Enid Watkins, Camp Singer, Loves Work

California Girl Enthusiastic Over Draft Men's Good Taste and Their Appreciation of Music

Need for Entertainment Pressing, She Says, After Months of Experience All Over the Country

Enid Watkins (at left) and Gladys Floete at Coronado Beach, Cal.

THE life of one who sings for soldiers encamped in this country partakes somewhat of the nature of a perpetual Caruso evening, with Jess Willard and Daniel Boone as supporting artists. Miss Enid Watkins is in town after singing for our soldiers since last August, and she says that the person who bewails the lack of frontiers and of the adventures arising out of them should set out on a journey such as hers has been.

Miss Watkins is a comely Californian, with hair like Etrusean gold. If she had Mr. Shonts's enterprise she might advertise that she has sung for more soldiers than were in the Paris garrison that taxicabbed gayly out to meet the Germans at the Marne.

But though our soldiers are not at all indifferent to personal beauty, they want music. They like the way Miss Watkins sings, one learns from the Y. M. C. A. War Council. In consequence she is soon going again through the Eastern, Southern and Western departments.

Never Room Enough in Huts.

The Young Men's Christian Association has provided each camp with from ten to fourteen buildings. Among these is always the "hut"—really a theatre—which will seat more than a thousand men. But there is never room enough.

Either in this country or in Europe "bringing down the house" is no longer the phrase of an overenthusiastic music critic, if there ever was such a person anyway. Witness the case of a Y. M. C. A. hut for Pershing's men in France. After a concert, according to a recent cable, it took several industrious and conscientious carpenters two days to repair the ravages made upon the buildings.

After the men had packed the auditorium until they could not move they crowded about the doors and windows outside until they were out of hearing distance. Then some one thought of taking to the roof, and when the concert was over the place looked like the temple after Samson had pulled it down.

Camp Life Not Exciting.

You will notice that there is a gentle monotony in all news, from whatever source, of the army camps. That is because a regular life—rising at half-past 5 in the morning, a lot of drills and lectures, eating and peeling potatoes and washing dishes and so to bed—is not exciting.

Miss Watkins says that the men at the cantonments need music and good entertainment, because many of the camps are far from large cities, which she thinks is the ideal situation. And then the time of waiting to go to fight is the most trying of all.

Miss Watkins watched with pleasure the New York boys from Camp Upton in their magnificent parade. "It was splendid," she said, "but every town near every camp I have visited could give such a parade with just as many and as finely trained men. I want people to know this. Perhaps they do already; but before I went out singing I did not know how many fine soldiers we did have."

Hot Baths Real Luxury.

As for keeping the boys amused, she says that people near the cantonments do their best. They give dances, dinners and public entertainments. They also dispense hot baths, which are reckoned among the most acceptable of the delicate attentions possible to be extended to our army.

"If I had time," Miss Watkins said, "I'd write a book on what the people think entertains soldiers. For some of them surely have strange ideas.

"I do not see, for instance, what prompts women in certain parts of the country to examine all Red Cross kits sent to soldiers and carefully and virtuously take out every cigarette.

"In the same localities they will present entertainments which they think the soldiers will like. These are invariably done with better intentions than effects. And not infrequently they are in bad taste and make the soldiers' lives unhappy for an hour or so.

"Soldiers, they should remember, are just people. They seem to me a great deal more human than other people. And the draft armies are the most representative and democratic organizations in the world.

"When I see what they really like and hear what they ask for in the way of music and books I am proud of them. For their standards are high. Nobody need think that any claptrap music will satisfy or that foolish and cheap magazines will be read. Further, such things are not wanted in the camps. The boys have taste and plenty of common sense."

At first Miss Watkins went cautiously at making a programme. She had been told by perfectly well meaning persons that "the soldiers did not want any highbrow stuff." So she made up a list of good songs of rather a medium character.

But after the first time she became bolder. Now she sings something from an opera, usually from one of Puccini's, as he is the favorite, and a French, an Italian, a Scotch and an Irish song. She has even tried Debussy on the soldiers, and they were wild over the music.

Of popular songs the soldiers like first "The Long, Long Trail." It's not out of place to say that Zo Elliott, the composer, esteems Miss Watkins's singing of this the best in the world, not even John McCormack's excepted. Then there are "Memories," "The Sunshine of Your Smile" and "Keep the Home Fires Burning."

Before the war Miss Watkins pursued the calling of a concert singer, having been trained in New York and in the West. Moreover, she learned the Indian lore of the Southwest and used to attire herself in the picturesque beads and buckskin of the redskin and give tribal chants to large and appreciative audiences.

When they asked her to sing at Angel Island, in the bay of San Francisco, and the home of interned Germans, she was indignant. But they soon explained that the island held a recruiting station. It was there that she learned that she could sing for soldiers.

Of course many of the boys write to Miss Watkins. They are good letters, too, all written, it appears, for a larger audience than a concert singer. They show a fine manhood and are suitable preliminaries to heroism on battle fields in northern France.

"As soon as you get into camp," Miss Watkins said, "you are pleased with the good manners of the men. They say the French are more gallant. Well; they cannot be more courteous and friendly than our men.

"After a few minutes' talk with them, you know just whom they have left at home; whether it is a mother, sisters, a brother, a chum, or a sweetheart. They are so spontaneous and openhearted that you love them."

They tell her their ambitions and give their opinions upon the duration of the war and upon world politics, though their conversation is not destitute of remarks on the merits of woodchopping as a settingup exercise, and as for cookery and scullery jobs, they are becoming expert.

"You seldom hear a complaint from them," she said, "although one young man in the machine gun corps in a camp said that for his part he was getting tired of looking at 40,000 men." Which would hardly warrant a court-martial.

You find, she says, many educated men of some fortune and place in the world, content to enlist without rank in the armies, not feeling that they are better than anybody else. There is David Proctor of New York, a musician, an actor, a lover of art, a composer, and rich. He was at Spartanburg. His only boast was of a pudding made by his own hand, and enjoyed by forty men. He became such a favorite with the cook that he had little time to chop wood. Which he found disappointing, as he wanted to cut wood with the best of them. Now he is going to France as one of the interpreters for Gen. Pershing.

Red Cross Much Respected.

Soldiers, Miss Watkins said, respect the Red Cross for the sweaters and warm clothes which come early in a man's life at training quarters. But when the job of transportation comes they love it. For the women meet trains and give out chocolate, hot coffee and sandwiches, not forgetting magazines and games to keep them amused. One of the letters from a soldier boy, fashioned after a military order, gave an account of such a journey.

Railroad journeys about the country are fraught with many hardships. There is compensating amusement. Take the case of Deming, N. M. It was a surprise to Miss Watkins that she went there at all; but it was a blow for the soldiers at first.

Here came a telegram which said to meet the train, that Enid Watkins would arrive at 4 o'clock. The orderly who got the job complained bitterly. That fellow Watkins, he said, must think himself a grand personage. Plenty of better men, he'd bet, than Watkins, had walked from the camp without all this fuss. And though in the end the order had to be obeyed, it didn't make any great hit in camp to think that a snob was arriving, whatever the nature of his visit might be.

Orderly Much Relieved.

At 4 o'clock that afternoon the train gave up two good looking young women. The cloud flew off the orderly's face in record time when one of these ladies said she was Enid Watkins, come to sing for them.

For the auto it was but a matter of a few minutes back to camp with the glorious news. They had just got out of sight of the station when a fierce sandstorm arose. The air was so thick with dust that they could see nothing. Some say they had to take the gravel out of their mouths, as a man does when he is reduced to eating terra firma in a football game. But after an experience as devastating to the latest San Francisco styles as the locusts were to Egypt they got to camp.

Miss Watkins and her companion were received so cordially that they stayed five days, having no clothes whatever except those they wore. So they'd take a day off now and then and wash. By doing this you didn't lose your social standing. All the 40,000 or so men bent their backs to just such menial toil, so there was no false shame.

Cabaret Business Slow.

The town has several cabarets, all carried on in true movie fashion, with villains, heroes, heroines, Mexicans and cowpunchers. Villains and Mexicans are indigenous to the locality, but the others sprang up to glean a few coins from the soldiers. And business is not rushing.

The cowboys come in ki-yi-ing and buckerooing, if that's what you call it, and shoot out all the lights in the town according to the best Wild West traditions. Although these things are entertaining in the cinema, Miss Watkins says they are really too realistic in a closeup. Moreover, they are not what the soldiers want.

Unlike the vague longings of the civil population, the soldiers have definite needs: Warm clothes, cigarettes, letters, letters by all means; good books and magazines, good music, singing, orchestras, soloists.

Getting a Subway Seat in the Rush Hour

GETTING a subway seat is sometimes the result of using one's feet instead of one's hands, which is the generally accepted way of acquiring a place into which to fling one's frame during the rush hour after a strenuous day down town. A man who is employed in Nassau street two blocks south of the Brooklyn Bridge evolved the scheme, and he herewith unfolds its workings for the benefit of those who are employed in the same neighborhood but who find it difficult to get a subway seat:

"People in the building with me complain that they never get a subway seat going home because the trains are too crowded by the time they reach Brooklyn Bridge. The cars are just at that stage where all the seats are occupied, but not many people are standing.

"So whenever I hear these people complaining I ask them why they don't use their feet. They reply that they use their hands, but that doesn't seem to get them anything. Naturally they want to know how the use of their feet is going to get them seats. I point out to them that the simple expedient of walking to the Fulton street station is all that is necessary to get them seats five nights out of six.

"Of course, they never had thought of that; perhaps they are too lazy, because the walk to Fulton street is a block or so longer than that to Brooklyn Bridge. But think of all the strain that is removed if one gets a seat, providing he has to ride for a long distance. Experience taught me that nearly every night there is a sprinkling of seats in the trains when they pull into Fulton street."